

MEETING MINUTES
(Approved by TAC as “DRAFT”)

CITY OF TUCSON HABITAT CONSERVATION PLAN
Technical Advisory Committee
Wednesday, March 7, 2007, 1pm to 3pm
US Fish & Wildlife Office 201 N. Bonita, Suite 141
Tucson, Arizona

ATTENDEES

City of Tucson Technical Advisory Committee: Trevor Hare (Sky Island Alliance), Rich Glinski (Arizona Game and Fish Department – *retired*), Linwood Smith (Environmental Planning Group), Marit Alanen (United States Fish and Wildlife Service), Dennis Abbate (Arizona Game and Fish Department), Ralph Marra (Tucson Water Department), and Guy McPherson (University of Arizona).

Other Attendees:

Jaimie Galayda (Arizona State Land Department), Ann Phillips (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development), Leslie Liberti (City of Tucson – Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development), Geoff Soroka (SWCA), and Cathy Crawford (Arizona Game and Fish Department).

1. Minutes

For the 2-7-07 Draft TAC Meeting Minutes, additional comments were requested from the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and none were offered, so all comments from the previous review were accepted as is, and the minutes will be revised accordingly.

2. Updates

Cathy Crawford reported on the latest burrowing owl (BUOW) information and provided a draft outline of items that should be addressed at a future regional BUOW expert meeting. According to Cathy, the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AGFD) does not issue permits for relocation of BUOW, rather permits are issued by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) regional office in Albuquerque. Cathy suggested preparing a memorandum to USFWS asking for a reevaluation of the manner in which these permits are provided. She is also looking into what AGFD is currently funding in terms of BUOWs. It was addressed that a BUOW expert meeting should include David Grandmaison and Courtney Conway. Meeting topics should include: 1) information needed to strengthen the position requesting that USFWS limit permits; and 2) conservation measures needed in both Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs). It was mentioned that due to the ease of obtaining relocation permits, developers may not be avoiding potential impacts to BUOW.

Rich felt that USFWS would halt issuance of permits if they heard that AGFD felt relocation was controversial and that it may have negative impacts. Cathy was not sure whether the AGFD state office would take this stand, and that it may be necessary to put pressure on the state office from multiple sources, including NGOs. Trevor said that people moving owls must have an AGFD license to hold wildlife for rehabilitation, and thought that this could be the point where AGFD could take action, although Cathy did not agree. Even though the Tucson AGFD office has been concerned about the practice of relocation, Wild at Heart continuously requests relocation options. There was a discussion of whether the issue should be resolved at the federal or state level without consensus reached. Trevor felt that the wildlife-holding permit process should be revised. Cathy felt that Elissa Ostergaard (Tucson AGFD) can address the state permit requirements at the regional BUOW meeting, whenever it occurs.

Trevor wondered if Greg Clark from Wild at Heart should be invited to attend the meeting. Elissa could give insight into whether Greg should attend. **Cathy, check with Elissa about Greg's attendance.** Dennis A. felt that Wild at Heart should indeed be included in this meeting because of their expertise on BUOW. He further noted that what we really need is to get the research done that would help resolve the questions that have repeatedly been asked. We need to identify any funding that is available to conduct this needed research. If the entities needing relocation (developers, etc.) can provide funding, then we might be able to collect needed data faster so that the question of relocation can be resolved.

Rich thought that Wild at Heart was likely the first group to have conducted these relocation efforts. USFWS and Wild at Heart should have records of all the relocations that have occurred in the past. Marit asked Kamile McKeever (USFWS) how much tracking is being conducted of these efforts. Kamile said that she is keeping records to verify that the number of owls is consistent with original permit requests, but otherwise there is very little data available. **Cathy and Marit will check with their agency and Wild at Heart to get whatever data is available.**

Geoff asked what would happen with regards to development if there was no relocation option. Trevor said that there could be more pressure on avoidance of impact, using relocation as a last resort. He doesn't want to see them falling under the blade because they are not listed.

Leslie noted that, in addition to the HCPs, restoration along the Santa Cruz River may be in conflict with BUOWs currently present along the river. We need to determine how the restoration effort regarding the addition of mesquites and understory can be compatible with burrowing owl conservation. Trevor said that, historically, the River was wider and BUOW habitat would have been somewhat farther from the channel. Rich asked if there are historical records of BUOW presence. A Swarth study of the Santa Cruz River, conducted in the 1920s, referenced owls to some extent. Rich wondered how extensive the BUOW breeding habitat was historically back when it was primarily composed of grassland habitat.

Harold Maxwell of Tucson Water Department reported that, as one trial strategy for buffelgrass treatment, he will burn soon. Travis Bean believes that this is an important opportunity to observe the dangerous fire activity that can be expected from buffelgrass fires. A soil check will occur after the fire, but Guy thinks that the buffelgrass seed bank will not be depleted by the burning, because soil is a good insulator. BUOW located nearby will also be monitored after the

burn. Leslie noted that the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) Environmental Subcommittee passed a resolution validating this buffelgrass effort. PAG will be presenting information at the City's Environmental Planning and Resources Subcommittee meeting this week.

Rich proposed either April 4 or 18 for the BUOW meeting. Cathy will follow up on organizing a meeting that would include Pima County, the Town of Marana, the City of Tucson (COT), Courtney Conway, David Grandmaison, and Wild at Heart. Topics will include issues of restoration, in conjunction with the preservation of BUOW habitat, so they are not in conflict.

Dennis distributed a copy of an AGFD lesser long-nosed bat (LLNB) proposal for studying movement patterns this season. To obtain additional information to build on last year's data, AGFD could put one transmitter on an LLNB each week, and concentrate efforts on following that individual bat. Dennis said that if the group is in favor of this research, the TAC should contact Michael Ingraldi (AGFD) about developing a complete proposal. Dennis said that the bulk of activity should occur between July and September. Leslie noted that the COT is requesting an extension of the Segment 2 deadline until September, but that Segment 3 funding could possibly be used to help fund this survey. Dennis noted the importance of tracking LLNB over time from June/July through August/September/October, and mentioned that focusing efforts in only one month will not get substantial data.

Leslie said that she would check the balance of funds in Segment 2, and get an IGA under way for Segment 3, but that it requires approvals from multiple institutions. Trevor wondered whether, if AGFD, USFWS, the Town of Marana, Pima County, and the COT all contributed, if costs could be covered. Dennis noted that very little of the funding for cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl (CFPO) research conducted by AGFD was provided by AGFD. Rich asked whether the AGFD Heritage Fund was a possible funding source. Dennis will ask Michael to prepare a more detailed proposal for review at an upcoming meeting, with a breakdown of funds that could be obtained from two different COT HCP grant segments.

3. Southlands

Leslie distributed a table listing each species of concern and the current status of research, habitat types, new information, and experts available to assist with these efforts. It was noted that the Tucson shovel-nosed snake and ground snake do not have potential habitat in the Southlands.

CACTUS FERRUGINOUS PYGMY-OWL (CFPO)

Scott Richardson (USFWS) delineated much of the Southlands planning area as habitat, especially within Cienega Creek and both sides of Sahuarita Road from Harrison to Wilmot. Dennis noted that there are no historical records detecting owls in these areas. There were records of occurrence in Sabino Canyon to the north and east. Geoff referenced possible auditory detection in the Rincon Mountains (near Posta Quemada), but Dennis said that this was never validated. The COT Office of Conservation and Sustainable Development (OCSD) will ask Scott to draw maps of potential habitat, which TAC can then review. Rich noted a connection between CFPO and low density housing. Trevor said that there are likely more negative impacts than

positive impacts resulting from proximity to low density residential housing, and that this residential habitat likely may function only as a part of a movement corridor. Leslie suggested identifying good habitat (dispersal/overwintering), plus movement corridors. Dennis has seen owls in sparse open habitat (e.g. ocotillos), as long as they are comfortably able to move through it in short bursts of flying and perching. Scott noted good habitat in an email to Leslie, illustrating available breeding habitat, and noting that drainages serve as good dispersal corridors.

Rich noted a current proposal to breed owls in captivity. Dennis said that 10 individuals from Arizona have been captured for this breeding program. He added that they have been paired and are being held by Wild at Heart. This will help to determine if this is a reasonable strategy for conservation measures. Previous breeding occurred with subspecies of CFPO at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum; in an 11-year period, there were 4 years with successful breeding. Dennis felt that, even if the experiment is successful, captive-bred CFPO would not be released until 2008 after several more generations have been bred. Mike Ingraldi is the chief investigator for this effort and Scott is overseeing this. No recovery team exists at this time, but a proportion of the former members of the CFPO Recovery Team have been consulted. Dennis said that a document (an augmentation plan) is currently being reviewed, and he doesn't think it includes release sites. This plan was written by USFWS and AGFD. **Ask Scott about whether this plan is available. The stressors and threats document is probably sufficient. Leslie will look at whether CFPO augmentation of the Southlands planning area would be a portion of this effort.**

BURROWING OWL (BUOW)

David Grandmaison provided a map of potential burrowing owl (BUOW) habitat. **The COT is going to find out if this is additional to habitat already mapped, or if it is complete. Also, the COT will need to find out if the electronic version is compatible with the COT's system.** David has proposed some minor modifications to stressors and threats: 1) the limited availability of burrows will influence habitat suitability; and 2) movement of people may be a problem depending on frequency, proximity, and duration. Trevor asked if David is concerned about humans on trails affecting BUOW. Leslie noted that there are places where bike paths meet BUOW habitat, and wondered whether owls are disturbed by that. **Leslie will see what Grandmaison says about the human/bird interaction. This group discussion, and the AGFD meeting, will inform the TAC group.**

CACTI (Pima Pineapple Cactus (PPC) and Needle-Spined Pineapple Cactus (NSPC))

On March 20, Marc Baker will report on his cacti surveys in the Southlands planning area. This report will be submitted for review, and will likely not be reviewed by Mima Falk before then. Marc's report should provide a habitat map for higher-density Pima pineapple cactus areas. However, the map may only note presence for the needle-spined pineapple cactus. The stressors and threats for the two cacti will also be reviewed by Marc. The Nichol turk's head cactus has not been found in the Southlands planning area.

LESSER LONG-NOSED BAT (LLNB)

Cathy showed a map of locations of lesser long-nosed bats (LLNB) viewed at hummingbird feeders. There is no new information on recent surveys for the LLNB. Scott Richardson (USFWS) said that there are no known roost sites within the planning area, but that the far eastern and southeastern portions have potential roosting habitat. These areas will need to be mapped. We also need to decide how to map LLNB habitat; whether we want to capture potential roosting habitat, foraging plants such as agaves and saguaros, or some other strategy. **AGFD has new aerial photography, we need to see if this is available and at what scale it can detect. We need to ask Kathleen of the Town of Marana about how they have decided to manage this species. We may also want to check with Julia Fonseca (Pima County) about using saguaro presence to map potential LLNB habitat.** We need to somehow map saguaro populations, but it is very difficult to map other than adult cacti. There may be some outlines of saguaro areas mapped by Charles Lowe. Leslie will talk to Scott more to see if we only need to capture areas with higher densities. According to Scott, AGFD is creating a model of roost sites, but not foraging areas. The Pima County model relies too heavily on springs and streams to emphasize priority conservation areas. Trevor believes that we potentially have agaves in the expanded Southlands. Mima originally felt that elevations in the planning area are not high enough for agaves, but this was before the area was considered as a dispersal corridor.

PALE TOWNSEND'S BIG-EARED BAT (PTBB)

We used upland Sonoran Desert and semidesert grassland communities to define pale Townshend's big-eared bat (PTBB) habitat. We need further discussions regarding edge habitat having greater foraging potential. Should the habitat model be buffered so that we are focusing only on edge riparian habitat as being the best foraging habitat available? Linwood did not know which buffer width should be used. **We will start with 50 feet and 100 foot buffers, and then bring this map to a future TAC meeting.**

Trevor wondered if the COT would have an envelope-driven buffer outlined in the new riparian ordinance. Currently, it is just habitat without any buffers. Trevor noted a study of mid-western leopard frogs, in which it was determined that they require a 1 km buffer and that the preferred buffer was 1.5 km; in other words, the larger the buffer the better.

WESTERN YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (YBC)

We have a habitat map, which will be digitized soon. Geoff met with Brian Wooldridge and Jason Douglas (USFWS) to determine where potential Western yellow-billed cuckoo (YBC) habitat may exist within the planning area. The YBC species account mentions that Rincon and Cienega Creeks could provide occupied habitat in wet years. The account also notes that suitable, but marginal, habitat exists just outside of the planning area in Agua Caliente, Agua Verde, and Posta Quemada Creeks. Brian Wooldridge's mapping reflects the possibility of YBC occupancy in mesquite bosque. The stressors and threats document needs to be sent to Brian Wooldridge and Troy Corman (AGFD).

DESERT TORTOISE

We need to convene the tortoise committee meeting soon. **Trevor will ask the experts what features or elements besides rocky uplands need to be mapped within large washes and large wash systems.** The subcommittee members are all of those who have attended past meetings, plus Marc Baker and Cecil Schwalbe (UofA). Trevor said that Lori Anderson will no longer be available from the Coalition to attend TAC meetings. **Trevor will see if he can get a lot of information before convening the meeting and it was noted that if a habitat map was prepared then the meeting could convene.**

HUACHUCA WATER UMBEL

In reference to the stressors and threats for this species, Priscilla Titus noted that loss of vegetation, soil compaction, and impervious surfaces could potentially affect the floodplains supporting riparian areas. Leslie said that all riparian species (fish, water-umbel, lowland leopard frog, etc.) could be lumped together for most threats and stressors.

FISH

According to Doug Duncan, the Gila topminnow occupies the lower half of Cienega Creek, while the Gila Chub occupies the middle section of the perennial flow at the “horseshoe.” **OCS D will find out exactly where these areas are and map them. We also need to get stressors and threats identified for these species.**

LOWLAND LEOPARD FROG

According to Jim Rorabaugh (USFWS), threats and stressors include development adjacent to habitat, which results in increased recreational use, and pets or children who may prey upon the species. Possible habitat exists in Cienega Creek, south of Marsh Station Road, while Saguaro Park and Rincon Creek historically were occupied by lowland leopard frogs. Trevor noted that many lowland leopard frogs occupy private east-side ponds. It was decided, though, that these areas utilized for propagation purposes do not need to be mapped. Trevor felt that all of Cienega Creek provided potential habitat, up to the area where it dries out at the bridge.

MEXICAN GARTER SNAKE

The listing package for this species was turned down in December, but it will be resubmitted in two years, so the TAC decided to leave the Mexican garter snake on its target species list. As this species relies heavily on lowland leopard frogs, the threats and stressors and possible habitat areas may be greatly connected.

MERRIAM’S MOUSE

The latest response from Phil Rosen (UofA) is that the results from four trapping sites are all *merriami*, and not *eremicus*. **(We need to get a quote from Leslie regarding this).** If Ken Kingsley’s (SWCA) and Rosen’s samples have all been correctly identified, then it appears that scientists either cannot tell the difference, or that *merriami* is much more widespread than

originally thought. Trevor noted that because Merriam's mouse relies on such a rare habitat type (mesquite bosque), the Town of Marana kept the species on its target list. Leslie asked if the species could be left only as a conservation recommendation, and noted that protection of its habitat will likely be captured by other species' protection. Leslie also mentioned that we don't have enough information about what it would take to conserve this species.

SOUTHWESTERN WILLOW FLYCATCHER

According to Doug Duncan, migrating and even nesting southwestern willow flycatchers may be considered for inclusion on the list of species of concern because they have been seen in upper Cienega Creek. Trevor also believes that thick cottonwood-willow habitat is not necessarily required by this species. Linwood mentioned that Sherry Ruther and someone else conducted surveys in several consecutive years in Cienega Creek, and did not observe any. **We need to look further into this possibility with Jason Douglas (USFWS) and Doug Duncan.** Pima County also may be covering this species in their HCP.

We need to email the revised species accounts to all members. And we need to get another set of binders for all TAC members. Trevor wondered where in the expanded Southlands planning area could be considered desert tortoise habitat. It was also decided that Marc Baker should be added to the desert tortoise contact list.

4. Call to audience

No members of the public present.

6. Adjournment

It was decided to adjourn early as all agenda items have been addressed.